

The Home of God standalone worship series

All Saints Sunday (November 3, 2024)

[Revelation 21:1-6, John 11:32-44](#)

Color: White

INTRODUCTION

All Saints is one of those glorious moments of grief and of hope. It is worth a standalone worship event. It is an acknowledgement of the gaps left behind by those we have loved and lost in the past year and longer. But it is also a celebration of the promise of eternity and the sense that even those we no longer see in the flesh are still a part of the foundation of our faith. We give God thanks for their witness of their lives. We ask on this day for a glimpse of the promise. What would it be like to be at home with God? Or to have God move into our neighborhood?

PLANNING NOTES

A new heaven and a new earth. Mary crying, Martha stoically stating the facts, Jesus weeping and then bringing a dead man back to life. These are our images, our companions, for All Saints. They situate us in the tension between now and what is to come, and they ground us in the glorious truth that God has made, is making, and will make God's home among us. God is in the business of moving into the neighborhood of humanity. In the joys and the sorrows, in the peaceful times and in the crisis moments, God sticks it out right alongside us.

And so, as you go about your traditions for All Saints, consider how they point to God's closeness with us. I love beginning All Saints every year with "For All the Saints" (*United Methodist Hymnal* 711). Every time we lift our voices to this majestic tune, joining with all creation "Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: Alleluia! Alleluia!"—it's glorious! Consider, though, how to pair the glory of "For All the Saints" with the intimacy of a hymn like "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" (*United Methodist Hymnal* 479) or "Be Still, My Soul" (*United Methodist Hymnal* 534). As you pray for the saints who have gone before, also pray for the saints gathered together in the worship space. If you have a tradition of listing the names of the saints the community has lost in the last year, perhaps there is also room to celebrate the saints who have joined you through birth or a move into the neighborhood in the last year. All Saints is rich with traditions for many of our communities, and it is important to observe those traditions because of the meanings those traditions build in a community. The question is, "Do your traditions emphasize God who is far away or God who is in the neighborhood with you through griefs and joys?"

Consider, too, how remembering the saints of your community can also be a time for reinvigorating and renewing the church's commitment to continue the good work God started with and among those saints. Is there a story to share of a saint whose witness the church can continue in the community? What wisdom did your saints leave behind for the church and its members? What might it look like to crowdsource a collection of lessons and/or stories from those who died in the last year that could be shared during the service? All Saints is a time of remembering, yes, but also a time of re-remembering, of reaffirming our shared identity as the Body of Christ, knowing that nothing can separate us from God or, through God, one another—not even death!

PREACHING NOTES

As John concludes his amazing story, he wants us to hear the echoes all the way back to the beginning of the saga of the people of God. Our Bible begins with God saying, "Let there be..." and there was, and God said, "It is good." And now we end with a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth, and it is good. Starting over, or returning to what was intended from the beginning? Who knows? John doesn't and isn't given to philosophize about it here. His task is merely descriptive. A new Jerusalem, adorned like a bride. Beautiful, presenting the best that could be, dazzling in glory and wonder. And that is us! Well, our home, our community, our part in the new creation.

A city, and a holy and beautiful city to be sure, but a city. "Why a city," some ask? If you are of a more rural bent, if your idea of paradise is escape, wilderness, get out and get away, then you are forgiven a small disappointment when John presents paradise as a city. Where are the rolling hills and the vast expanse? Where is the seclusion, the privacy, the separateness? Why a city, for heaven's sake?

Because the kingdom of God is almost always more about connection than it is about separation. The picture that Jesus draws in a hundred stories and images is about community more than it is about individualism. So, of course, the culmination of history is a city. In a city, we have to learn to live together. In a city, we are dependent on one another for even the basic things of life. In a city, we find it harder to fool ourselves into thinking that it is all about us and only us.

And it is a dry city! The sea will be no more. The sea is both that which separates us, a divider between people into us and them, and that which harbors the unknown. The sea is the place of chaos, the source of evil - the beast rises from the sea in Revelation. The new city, the dry city, is a place of safety and community. That which separates is gone; that which terrorizes has been removed. So, there are no more tears, no more death and grief, no more pain.

It is more than the removal of the sea, however, that gives us this sense of wholeness and security. It is because of our new neighbor. God, John points out, has moved into the empty house on your cul-de-sac. And there goes the neighborhood! When God moves in, everything changes. When God takes up residence, our sense of aloneness, even when surrounded by people who are also alone in their thoughts and fears, is transformed into hope and joy. What we discover first when God moves in is our desire to be connected, to be in relationship. We discover that our neverending search for self has been misdirected from the beginning. Instead of moving inward to discover who we really are apart from anything and everything, we should have been moving outward. We find out who we really are in relationship with one another. We find ourselves when we lose ourselves.

That sounds like something Jesus said, doesn't it? That brings me to the other echoes in this passage. John stands at the end of history and reaches back to the beginning of this new age. Revelation is primarily a Christological work. It is the culmination of the work that was begun in Christ. And John points to the watershed moment upon which history turned. John looks back at the cross as he stands here at the end.

Verse six begins "It is done," thus fulfilling that which was proclaimed from the cross, as with his dying words Jesus declared, "It is finished." It was never a statement of despair, of giving up, of surrender. It

was a shout of triumph through bloody, cracked lips and pushed out from lungs struggling for a last breath. Finished. It is done. And this is what was done: a new creation where death will be no more.

But it was the next to the last thing that Jesus said from the cross that becomes the invitation to enter this kingdom. With parched throat, Jesus whispers, “I am thirsty.” And now the voice from the throne declares, “To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.” The Revelation question is, “Are you thirsty?”

The question from John’s Gospel for this All Saints observance, even though it comes before the assigned text, is, “Do you believe this?” (*John 11:26 NRSV.*) “Do you believe,” Jesus asks Martha, “that death as commonly understood is not a part of God’s design for eternity? Do you believe that what seems to be the end is not the end? Do you believe that separation and abandonment and aloneness is not what God had in mind for creation? Do you believe that Jesus’ tears are about the grief that surrounds him and limits the vision of those who are left behind when a loved one dies?”

There are so many theories about why Jesus wept before the tomb of Lazarus. We don’t suggest that there is a simple explanation. But certainly, in those tears, we find the freedom, the permission if you will, to weep for our own losses. All Saints is a sad occasion on a profoundly human level. We need to give space for that as we worship. But those tears and that sadness are not to be seen as a denial of faith in eternity or the hope of reunion in a heaven beyond description. We can hold both things together, grief and hope. Joy and sadness often sit side by side in our hearts and in our communities. Indeed, we grieve not only for the loss of our named loved ones on this day, but for all the saints of the church, and for the innocents who are being lost every day in our broken world. At the same time, we hold out hope for the vision of kin-dom described by Jesus where faith bubbles up in surprising places and binds us together around this shared vision.

All Saints is not, in the end, an individual experience but a corporate one. Even though we all have our pantheon of saints whom we miss and reach for on our own journeys, we are bound together in this celebration to this common vision. In part, we long for and seek the home of God as we walk in faith. In larger part, we are seeking to become the home of God in our relationships, in our communities, and in the world we are striving to make. That is the world we pray for each time we say the Lord’s Prayer and ask for God’s kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. That’s the reunion, the hope, the cloud of witnesses we lean into on this day. The home of God is among us. Thanks be to God.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

In the beginning, God called the world into being, saying,
“Let there be light!”

In the fullness of time, Jesus came from God to us, saying,
“I am the Light of the world.”

In our everyday life, we see the work of the saints,
The ones in whom God’s light shines.

So let us give thanks for the saints this day,

And let us worship God.

We gather this morning to remember our call:

To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

We bring with us the events of the week in the world and in our lives,

Trying to know how to be just and loving and humble in the midst of it all.

We gather here, and see those who are doing justice, who are kind beyond measure,
who set the example for humility.

**With gratitude for living saints, with thankfulness for the purpose of faith,
let us worship God.**

Written by Beth Merrill Neel on her blog, "Hold Fast to What Is Good." Used with permission.
<https://holdfasttowhatisgood.com/liturgy/all-saints-liturgy/>.

Opening Prayer

Eternal God, hope of all who trust in you,
in Christ you weep with those who mourn
even as you cry out in triumph over the grave.
Unbind us from sin, release us from captivity,
and with Lazarus, raise us from death to life,
so that we may join that great crowd of saints
who forever sing praise to your holy name;
through Christ, the resurrection and the life.

From the **PCUSA** website.

https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/prayers_for_all_saints_day.pdf. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2017/10/all-saints-day-prayer-john-11.html>.

Prayer of Confession

Our lives are full of mistakes and errors – places where we follow self-generated idols instead of the One True God. We are not alone in these mistakes – all of those who have come before us also were plagued with temptation and sin. Let us come before God, just as generations of believers have done, and pray for God's forgiveness and grace.

**Beloved God,
who was known to our mothers and fathers,
and even to our spiritual forebears,
have mercy on us.
We do not always love as you would have us love.
We do not always do as you would have us do.
In our stubbornness,
we turn from you when we should turn toward you.
Hold us, dear One –
comfort us when we mourn the passing of friends and family,
and help us to know that they are rejoicing in your presence.
We praise you for the grace you shower on us,
constantly forgiving our errors,
especially the ones that we don't share with any but you.**

Hear now the silent fears and worries of our hearts.

A time of silence

Friends, hear the good news! Though thousands upon thousands of our ancestors did not follow God's ways perfectly, we have hope in the one who did! Jesus, a man of a particular people in a particular time, taught through his words and deeds that God has already forgiven us. Thus, we and all who have come before us are rightly known as saints – the holy ones of God! Thanks be to God for God's mercy, grace, and love! **Amen!**

Written by Rev. Lucas Keppel, Ancho Community & Corona United Presbyterian Churches, New Mexico. Posted on **LiturgyLink**. <https://www.liturgylink.net/2013/11/11/awareness-and-reconciliation-for-all-saints-day/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2017/10/all-saints-prayer-of-confession.html>.

Benediction

God invites us into his future,
where the one who makes all things new
has made his home among us.
We are called and chosen,
together embraced by the God in whom tears, mourning,
crying, pain and even death will be no more.
Remember God's future, for this is our story.
Our Lord says, "See, I am coming soon!"
and we respond, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Amen.

From the **Mennonite Church Canada** website.
<http://resources.mennonitechurch.ca/FileDownload/14014/Equip-116AssembluSunday.pdf>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/04/sending-revelation-21-1-6.html>.